2: Blackman E-5 (1920-1926) 1927
MR13 Fellahin MR13
Upper Egypt

instance, thinks he would like to add to his own property by stealing a portion of his neighbour's he will surreptitiously shift his boundary stones farther on to the adjoining land. This is, of course, quickly detected by the man whose land has been encroached upon, and a bitter dispute will follow, which may end in a violent quarrel.

The plough which is in common use at the present day is a primitive, but quite adequate, machine (Fig. 97). It is made entirely of wood, with the exception of the share, which is tipped with iron. It is generally drawn by oxen, but in Upper Egypt I have seen more than one plough with a camel and a donkey yoked together, a somewhat incongruous pair! The peasant follows on foot, guiding the plough, and usually singing as he works. Except during the inundation the work in the fields is incessant, for, owing to the very fertile soil, one crop can follow another in quick succession.

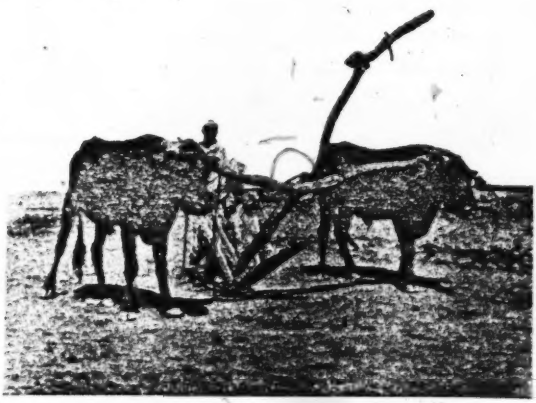

FIG. 97. A PLOUGH AS USED TO-DAY

The watering of the fields is very strenuous work, the commonest machine used for this purpose being the *shādūf* (see Fig. 13, right, and Fig. 108), a primitive water-hoist. It consists of two upright wooden posts, or pillars, made of mud and *būṣ*, connected by a horizontal bar, across which is slung another bar, or a stout branch of a tree, weighted at one end with mud and stones, while from the other end is suspended a leather or basket-work bucket. The man working the *shādūf* pulls down this bucket into the water (either river or canal), and, when it is full, allows the weighted end to raise it to the level of the land. He then pours the water into a prepared channel, through which it flows in the required direction.

2: Blackman E-5 (1920-1926) 1927
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Upper Egypt

AGRICULTURE AND HARVEST RITES

The corn is cut with a primitive sickle (Fig. 101), and is immediately tied up into small sheaves, which are carried to the threshing-floor on the backs of camels (Fig. 102). The threshing-floor is usually a bare place near the fields, and here the corn is piled up in great heaps.

The threshing is done with a sledge-like machine, called *nōrag*, drawn by oxen. It consists of a wooden frame, on which the driver sits, and solid iron wheels which are passed over and over the corn, breaking up the stalks and separating the grain from the husks (Fig. 103). The broken stalks are collected and packed into net sacks, which are carried off on the backs of donkeys (Fig. 104). The grain, which is, of course, still mixed up with chaff, is piled up in heaps ready for winnowing. This takes place out of doors, the grain being thrown up into the air with a large wooden fork or a wooden spade (Fig. 105). The wind carries off the chaff, the grain falling below in a heap (Fig. 106). A second process is necessary in order to clear the grain entirely of chaff, and so it is carefully sifted in large sieves. The grain is then piled up into heaps, over which palm-branches are sometimes placed to prevent the wind from blowing any of it away. The heaps are left standing all night, and late in the evening it is customary for the owner to place flat, round loaves of bread among the grain, these loaves being the perquisite of the man who, on the following morning, carries it to the owner's granaries.

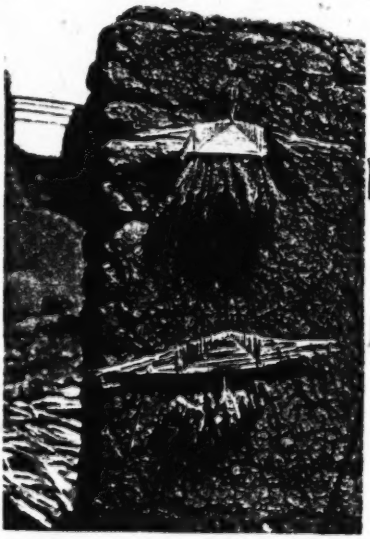

FIG. 99. TWO 'BRIDES OF THE CORN,' THE UPPER ONE NEW, THE LOWER SOME YEARS OLD

The granaries are usually situated on the roofs of houses, and are made of clay or basket-work.[1]

It is the custom to pay all the harvesters in kind (Fig. 107), and

[1] See pp. 153 f., 158.

2: Blackman E-5 (1920-1926) 1927
MR13 Fellahin MR13
Upper Egypt

threshing-floor, either *faṭīr*, *kunāfeh*, or *rashteh*, or cooked meat. He stands up on one of the heaps of grain and calls out to his

FIG. 102. CARRYING CORN TO THE THRESHING-FLOOR

friends, "Come and eat," and he fires off his gun as a sign of joy. When his friends have eaten he places some of the food that is over

FIG. 103. THRESHING WITH THE NŌRAG

around and in the heaps of grain. This, it is believed, will bring a blessing and a plentiful supply of the grain; also, so the peasants

SUPERSTITIONS

It is a common belief in Egypt, as, indeed, in some other countries also, that the soul can leave the body during sleep. It is therefore considered unsafe to wake anyone suddenly, for fear the soul should not have time to return to the body of the sleeper. Such awakening must be done very slowly, so as to give the soul ample time to return. I am not quite clear as to what happens if the soul does not get back in time; probably the sleeper's personality changes, or he becomes imbecile.

There is a strong belief among the peasants that the dead can appear to the living, speak with them, and issue commands. The strength of this belief can be seen in connexion with the sheikh cult discussed in Chapter XV. There are a number of ghost stories current in the country, the ghost being usually regarded as the dead man's *'afrīt*, which, as will be seen in the following chapter, is not the soul, but a separate entity. The two following ghost stories may interest my readers, the second ghost having only just begun to 'walk' a week or so before I arrived at the dead man's village.

The engine which controls the machinery for irrigating the fields of the rich *'omdeh* (headman) of a certain village is worked by steam, and the boiler is covered with a large sheet of iron. The steam is shut off late every evening, at about seven-thirty, and is turned on again at daybreak. To turn it on a man has to stand on the sheet of iron above the reservoir. One day the son of the assistant engineer made a mistake, saying that he had turned on the steam when he had not done so. The consequence was that more was generated than the boiler could contain, and it promptly exploded. An unfortunate man who was standing on the iron sheet was crushed against the ceiling and killed instantly. One night later a man who was sleeping in the engine-room with some of his fellow-workmen began to call out. His companions were aroused from sleep by his cries, and asked him what was the matter. He told them that he had seen the man who had been killed, and that he was wailing and crying *"Akh! akh! akh!"* ("Alas! alas! alas!"), and also had tried to poke out his (the speaker's) eyes with two of his fingers. Since this incident a great explosion is heard in the engine-room every night at twelve o'clock. The first time it was heard the guards and other people thought that there had been another accident, but, when they went to look, nothing had occurred, and the engine was not working. The

2: Blackman E-5 (1920-1926) 1927
MR13 Fellahin MR13
Upper Egypt
Ancient Egypt MR5
Graeco-Roman Egypt MR4

and from the excavations of the Deutsche Orient-Gesellschaft at el-ʿAmarneh.[1] The shifting of the boundary-stone (pp. 169f.) is condemned in *The Teaching of Amenōphis, the Son of Kanakht*.[2]

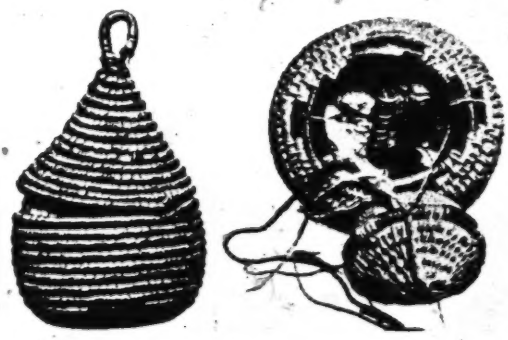

FIG. 176. A MODERN (LEFT) AND ANCIENT (RIGHT) BASKET
The latter after H. E. Winlock, *Bulletin of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York*, Part II (December, 1922), p. 35, Fig. 24.

The modern plough (p. 170 and Fig. 97) is almost exactly like the ancient one (see Fig. 178).[3] For a drawing of an ancient plough reconstructed from still surviving portions see Fig. 179. Dr Borchardt thinks that the ancient like the modern plough was furnished with a metal share. Accordingly the wooden share in Fig. 179 is represented as sheathed in metal. Dr B. P. Grenfell told my brother that the blade of the *tūriyeh* (hoe) had acquired its present shape, and was already made of iron, by Roman times, for he had found such blades in rubbish mounds of the Roman period.

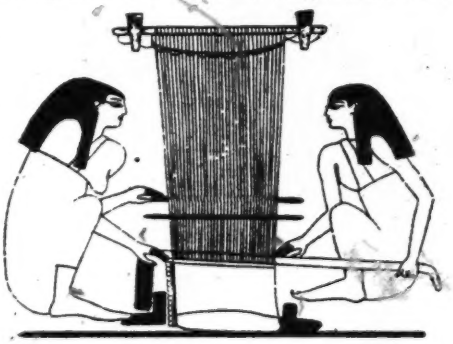

FIG. 177. TWO WOMEN WEAVING ON A HORIZONTAL LOOM
After F. Cailliaud, *Recherches sur les arts et les métiers*, Pl. 27A.

The modern *shādūf* (pp. 170 f.) finds its exact counterpart in

[1] *Mitteilungen der Deutschen Orient-Gesellschaft zu Berlin*, vol. l, p. 17. For a photograph showing a modern cultivated patch of ground so divided, see G. Steindorff, *Die Blütezeit des Pharaonenreichs* (Leipzig, 1926), Fig. 54.
[2] F. Ll. Griffith, *Journal of Egyptian Archæology*, vol. xii, p. 204.
[3] A. Erman and H. Ranke, *op. cit.*, Pl. 35; A. Erman, *Life in Ancient Egypt*, translated by H. M. Tirard (London, 1894), p. 426; J. G. Wilkinson, *The Ancient Egyptians*, vol. i, p. 281; L. Borchardt, *Priestergräber . . . vom Totentempel des*

132 He is exposed to the elements at a mean temperature
461 of 80°F in summer and 53°F in winter; he works barefoot and bare-headed. His labour is all muscular, and apart from his hands he uses only a few primitive implements, which, however, owing to the quality of the Egyptian soil and the multitude of manual labourers, are quite adequate.

PREPARATION OF THE SOIL

412 He uses the *fass* with great dexterity for a hundred different tasks, to turn and break the clods of earth, to dig furrows and till the land. The *fass* is a big tool, like a hoe, but heavy and solid. Its front part being fairly wide, it also serves as a spade. Even the poorest of labourers owns a *fass*; it is an indispensable addition to his own strong arm.

407 It may be said that every field in Egypt is tilled by hand,
[492] even when the fellah works with a plough, for the Egyptian plough is more of a tool than a machine, though it weighs 100 lb., and is carried to and from the field on donkey-back.

This is *el mihrat*, the Arab plough without wheels or breast, which is found in Palestine, in Syria and throughout North Africa. It consists of a wooden frame tipped with a flat, ogival share about 10 ins. long, and a shaft about 11 feet long, to which the draught animals are attached by a straight yoke pressing not on the forehead, as in Europe, but on the
231 withers. The draught-animals may be two *gamoossas*,
241 the smallholder's *gamoossa* and a donkey, or two animals hired for the occasion — sometimes even a camel and a donkey together.

241 The ploughman drives the share in by pressing on the
461 single handle, and guides the animals as they move by hand and voice, without as a rule using either bridle or whip. In this way he can till from one third to half a feddan a day. If he is an owner his beasts will be better fed, and he will be able to till as much as three quarters of a feddan in a day. The time employed in ploughing a field is from ten to twenty-five days a year. Except in the districts under basin irrigation this work can be carried on at any season.

407 In the concluding chapter of their study of Egyptian
241 ploughing[20] Audebeau and Mosseri write: 'The Egyptian plough is the typical implement of areas where it is only necessary to scratch the surface in order to bury the seed

and allow it to germinate before the top layer dries. This plough is also appropriate when as a result of a limited water supply the task is to prevent a premature drying-out of the soil. None of the imported ploughs tested hitherto has proved genuinely superior to the local plough, when mechanical, agricultural and economic factors are taken into account.'

The Egyptian plough is the resultant of two interacting factors, the nature of the soil and the means of the fellah (it costs no more than P.T. 100). Its mechanism is so simple that it does not have the effect of dispensing with the ploughman's effort or of putting a distance between him and his furrow; so contact between man and soil remains close.

To level down the tops of the furrows and break up the clods of earth the fellah uses a *zahhâfa*. This is nothing but a rough beam of wood, or the trunk of a palm tree, about twelve feet long, on which the fellah stands while it is pulled by a pair of draught-animals. This very primitive instrument thus acts both as roller and harrow, and is sometimes used also to cover in the seed sown by hand. The *zahhâfa* is used after ploughing, and about four feddans can be treated in a day.

To level the land, which since it is artificially irrigated must be as even as possible, the fellah uses his *kassâbia*, a sort of coffer weighing about 120 lbs and costing about 75 piastres. It has two sides, is open along the front, and is held by two handles, which the fellah raises in order to scrape off the mounds and fill up the hollows with the earth thus picked up.

The *gamoossa* and the donkey have often been mentioned, and will continue to be, for they are the two chief aids of the fellah, and are well adapted both to his needs and to Egyptian conditions.

The *gamoossa*, the poor man's cow, is a mud-coloured buffalo, stronger than the ox, and extremely resistant to disease. It must have more fodder than any other draught animal. On account of its great usefulness the fellah takes more care of it than he does of himself, which is not saying much.

If properly fed, the *gamoossa* gives more milk than any cow in Egypt. In winter and spring it needs to graze

3: Ayrout M-5 (ca. 1935) 1945
MR13 Fellahin MR13

243 weeks later the stalks stand higher than a man and are laden with heavy ears. It is time for harvesting. The workers, mainly women and children, pile the stalks into heaps, and then make a first sorting, throwing on one side the ears of maize, on the other the stripped stalks. The yield of a maize crop may be ten or twelve *ardebs* to the feddan, but the average for the country is seven and a half.

The stalks are now set up on end and intertwined to make a sort of circular hedge round the heaps of ears. In this open enclosure the fellaheen work day and night to strip the ears and break out the yellow grain, bigger than peas, [342 372] which they put into baskets and carry home. The stalks are also taken home on donkey back to serve as fuel or reinforcement for the roof. Nothing must be wasted.

C. Wheat

Wheat, on the other hand, has been since antiquity a traditional Egyptian crop. It is nowadays regaining some of the importance which it lost earlier to cotton, and is benefiting from the recent tendency towards greater variety of crops. In 1934 1,388,673 feddans were sown. In 1939 the area had increased to 1,466,000 feddans, which gave a total yield of 8,600,000 ardebs, or an average of 5.96 per feddan.

[262 439] Almost all the wheat is consumed in Epgyt, by middle-class Egyptians and the people in the towns. Owing to its low percentage of gluten and record earth-content it is barely exportable, though in 1937 Germany was negotiating purchases. Europeans and rich Egyptians prefer foreign flour, mostly imported from Australia or Canada.

[312 242] The fellah sows his wheat in November. He pays great attention to manuring and watering up to the period of the *gaffaf*, after which he waters it only once or twice more before harvest. He harvests in April, with a primitive sickle or by hand. The crop is bound into sheaves and carried on donkey- [492] or camel-back to the communal threshing-floor, where it is untied.

Each family in turn spreads out its crop. The *gamoossa* is brought to tread out the ears of corn spread over the ground. The poorest of the fellaheen beat their corn with [407] their staves (*nabbuts*). More often several of them share a

norag. This is a heavy wooden seat, supported on a rough chassis and moving on three axles armed with eleven solid sharp-edged discs for breaking up the straw. The driver sits in the chair and guides the *gamoossa* round in a circle over the ears so that the discs chop them up, while another worker throws fresh stalks under the machine. The *norag*, which is peculiar to Egypt, costs about L.E. 8. An even simpler variety without the cutting discs averages L.E. 3.

Winnowing is done, as in most Mediterranean countries, by throwing the chaff which contains the corn into the air in the direction of the wind, after it has been trampled and chopped up For this the fellaheen use a two- or four-pronged wooden fork, called a *garuf*. With one *norag* and several *garufs* they can deal with the produce of about 25 feddans.

Last of all the grain is sifted in large sieves by the women and put into sacks, jars or baskets, ready for sale.

D. Berseem

In summer cattle are fed either on chopped straw mixed with beans, or on barley ; but in winter they live on *berseem*, an Egyptian species of clover (*trifolium alexandrinum*). *Berseem* is cultivated everywhere and covers a fifth of the total acreage, for it nourishes the ground as well as the cattle by absorbing the nitrogen from the air into the soil. It provides excellent forage, grows quickly and brings good returns for a minimum of work. The fellaheen sow it between September and November, often after maize, cotton or rice, and before taking away the old stalks which serve to protect the seedlings. After fifty days or so it is ready for a first cutting, followed by four more at intervals of 35 days; the cattle graze on it as it grows Two thirds of a feddan will feed a *gamoossa*, or a quarter of a feddan a donkey, for one season.

E. Other Food Crops

There are a number of other foodstuffs which are produced by the fellah's labour from the soil of Egypt. It will suffice to mention the most important.

Rice was brought from India under the Caliphs, and is cultivated in the well-watered regions of Damietta and the Northern Delta.

243 Northern Delta. It occupies about 6% of the cultivated area, but its acreage depends on the height of the Nile flood, and is controlled by the Government. Thus in 1935 there were 470,375 feddans under rice, in 1937 only 240,469, and in 1939 476,454. The rice is of good quality and can be exported.

241 [262 252] Beans (*fûl*) provide fodder for draught animals, from June to December; those of the best quality, prepared with oil or fat, make a rich and popular dish.

Onions and sugar-cane are grown in Upper Egypt. Then there are barley, lentils and dates, not to mention vegetables and fruits, the cultivation of which, although confined to certain localities, increases year by year.

The fellah keeps a narrow strip or corner of his field for his own use. Here, without using any manure, he plants the vegetables appropriate to each season: *bamia* in winter, *fûl* in spring and *molokhiya* in summer. These will be mentioned again in the chapter on the fellah's food. Apart from occupying much less space than other crops, they are cultivated in much the same way as the rest.

241 463 181 Egypt is becoming a land of variety in crops, but this diversity has not involved any sort of specialisation for the fellah. He is still a manual labourer, a "Jack of all trades", and his work remains simple and monotonous. There is not enough differentiation to form specialists of any kind, nor enough uniformity to limit his work to one dull task. This means that the fellah can adapt himself to any new crop. He will never introduce a novelty himself, but will take to it if encouraged by authority, the more readily if experience proves it to pay. This has been noticeable in the case of flax.

177 242 407 Mechanical innovations, however, are a very different matter. The preceding pages will have made it clear that there is never any question of tractors, reapers or binders, let alone winnowing or threshing machines, or even cars and waggons. Such machines as these are scarcely more common today than in the past. The fellah is too poor to use them, and in any case he feels no need for any instrument which would divide him from the soil. It is true that the large estates under direct cultivation employ extremely modern machinery, which is handled by fellaheen, but this is an

exception. The fellaheen as a whole use no machinery at all. This is probably due less to habit or ignorance than to an instinct for self-preservation. If machinery is not more commonly used in Egyptian farming, the reason is that the owners find man-power more economical. For the moment the two points of view coincide. But it will not always be so. One day the fellaheen will increase their demands, and machines will become more profitable to the landowners. Manual labour should keep its leading place, however, for to mechanise labour in the Nile Valley would be to destroy the organic relationship which has grown up between the cultivators and their soil, and overthrow a balance now preserved by methods of labour appropriate to an abundant population.

2. Conditions of Work

To this soil the fellah devotes all his energies. He gives himself to it without reserve, even passionately when it is his own. But that is very rare. Here man belongs to the land, not the land to him. This is the true cause of both his lethargy and his poverty. None of the conditions under which he may labour make for freedom. Let us look in turn at each of the varying conditions which obtain today.

The Fellah as Forced Labourer

The *corvée* was suppressed in 1893, but continues to be legally applied in certain cases of public necessity. Then the fellah is mobilised by authority, torn from his field and his village, and sent to the spot where his services are needed.

It may be that the Nile flood threatens catastrophe. On such occasions hundreds of thousands of fellaheen are set to work day and night under the rod of officials and overseers to raise the embankments, build dykes, deal with any escape and watch the barrages.

Suppose a dyke is on the point of breaking. The fellaheen rush in a compact mass to the point of danger, each with his *fass* and basket. They heighten the dyke and buttress it with a great rampart composed of earth, rushes, palm-trunks, and — if need be — maize-stalks and sugar-cane.

In 1934 they saved the country by such efforts. The Government set aside L.E. 150,000 to fight the danger;

407

/For information on types of Egyptian plows and their evolution see category 116, pp. 241-268, 272-277 and 8 end plates./